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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000688

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION DEPUTIES RETURN TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: ABIDJAN 633

Classified By: DCM V. VALLE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Opposition deputies agreed to return to the National Assembly on June 23 in order to receive salaries that had been withheld for three months by the FPI president of the Assembly. The denouement of what should have been a relatively minor affair is a victory for President Gbagbo and the ruling FPI but the future role of the National Assembly remains unclear. Prime Minister Banny has said he will not submit any legislation to the Assembly for its consideration, but under the Constitution only the President or members of the National Assembly can introduce legislation in any case. End summary.

#### Opposition Deputies Climb Down and Return to Parliament

¶2. (U) Deputies from the opposition RHDP coalition, which had been boycotting the National Assembly after the body's mandate expired last December, threw in the towel last week and agreed to return to the Assembly in order to receive their salaries, which had been withheld for the last three months by Assembly president and ruling FPI party hardliner Mamadou Koulibaly as punishment for their absenteeism.

¶3. (U) After a meeting between President Gbagbo and all the deputies on June 19, a joint commission was established to resolve the crisis chaired by presidential spokesman Desire Tagro and including representatives from the Prime Minister's office and each of the political factions in parliament (FPI and the opposition PDCI, UDPCI, and Solidarity). The commission drafted an agreement that was signed on June 23 by representatives of the various Ivoirian parties in the presence of President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Banny, and in which the RHDP deputies agreed to return to the National Assembly to resume their duties according to the Constitution and UNSC Resolution 1633. Shortly before signing this agreement, and as a quid pro quo for doing so, the opposition deputies received 60% of their salary arrears, or about CFA 4 million (about \$8,000) each.

¶4. (C) The RHDP deputies also affirmed their readiness to carry out peace missions entrusted to them by the Prime Minister. These missions were cited by the International Working Group (IWG) in its communique of last January, when it recommended that the Prime Minister send the former deputies, now that their mandate had expired, on peace missions throughout Cote d'Ivoire. The idea was to keep the deputies gainfully employed and away from legislative matters. (The IWG mentioned these missions again in its most recent communique of June 23, in which it demanded that all deputies be paid their proper salaries equally so that they could carry out the PM's peace missions. The opposition deputies, however, had already signed the agreement to return to parliament before the IWG communique was issued.)

## Victory for the FPI

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15. (C) The recent turn of events represents a victory for Gbagbo and his FPI supporters. First, they have succeeded in getting the opposition deputies to accept their position that the National Assembly's mandate remains in effect. They have also highlighted the venality of the opposition deputies, who were all too willing to climb down from their position for the sake of receiving their paychecks. (In a meeting with Ambassador on June 21, opposition party leaders argued vehemently and unconvincingly that their position was based on principle, but the issue of contention seemed always to return to money.)

## Dissent Within the Opposition

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16. (C) In addition, the dispute has fomented dissent within and among the various opposition parties. Within the parties, there has been a rift within deputies and their parties' leadership. PDCI Secretary General and RHDP chairman Djedje Mady, for example, criticized the deputies for returning to parliament before the PM had assigned them peace missions. (Bedie had earlier given PDCI deputies CFA 41 million to tide them over while they boycotted the Assembly. The PDCI deputies had distributed this sum among all opposition deputies so that each had received about CFA 500 thousand or \$1,000. No word yet if the deputies agreed to return these funds now that they have begun receiving their salary arrears.) The UDPCI leadership also criticized the return of the opposition deputies.

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## It's Alimentary

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17. (U) Among the opposition parties, the MFA, who does not have members in parliament and therefore finds it easier to stand on "principle," was particularly critical of the deputies who returned, with the MFA accusing them of discrediting the National Assembly and of behaving as "food deputies" (deputes alimentaires) who thought only of their bellies. The RDR, who similarly lacks official representatives in parliament, asserted that the opposition deputies were returning, not to examine bills, but only to work on the peace missions assigned to them by Banny.

## Gbagbo Strengthened, Banny Weakened

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18. (C) The Assembly dispute has strengthened Gbagbo and weakened Banny. The former has intervened forcefully to resolve the impasse while the PM has engendered resentment among the opposition parties for not acting to pay the boycotting deputies and "forcing" them to slink back to parliament on the FPI's terms. Gbagbo played up his victory by commenting at the signing ceremony that "one cannot let Prime Minister Banny work alone, otherwise he will not succeed." Gbagbo has also been fortified by his role in ending the university professors' strike (septel). After meeting on June 21 with representatives of the group of university professors (CNEC) that has been leading the strike, the professors announced on June 23 that they were going back to work even though Gbagbo offered them no concessions beyond those previously proposed by the Prime Minister.

## But Future Role of National Assembly Remains Unclear

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19. (C) Beyond the divisions created by this affair and the time wasted over what should have been a relatively minor issue, the future role of the reconstituted National Assembly

remains unclear. The agreement that was signed stipulates that all the laws required by past peace accords have already been enacted by the National Assembly. It also contains an implicit understanding that President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Banny will be responsible for implementing any additional measures required by the peace process without submitting them to the National Assembly for approval. However, it remains to be seen how this understanding will work in practice. If the opposition deputies refuse to participate in legislative debates, the FPI deputies may move to reimpose disciplinary measures such as suspension of benefits or even expulsion of recalcitrant deputies. On the other hand, PM Banny told the IWG on June 23 that he had no intention of presenting any legislation to the National Assembly and that he considered the 2006 budget, proposed by the executive branch but not submitted to the Assembly, as already approved. However, under article 42 of Cote d'Ivoire's constitution, only the President or members of the National Assembly have the right to introduce legislation.

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